

THE JEWISH PURGE IN THE SATELLITE COUNTRIES

Behind the Communist Turn to Anti-Semitism

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WHEN Rudolf Slansky, the Secretary General of the Communist party of Czechoslovakia, was removed from his post in September 1951, and arrested on charges of treason ten weeks later, many people wondered if this was the beginning of a general purge of Jews in the satellite countries. In May 1952, a second prominent Communist leader of Jewish origin, Ana Pauker of Rumania, shared Slansky's fate: she was first removed from party office, and then from her post as Foreign Minister. In the meantime, it was discovered that almost every Czechoslovak Jew of prominence, whether in Slansky's circle or outside it, whether in the party or in the government, had been demoted, expelled from the party, or arrested. In Rumania, the same process started after Ana Pauker's fall. Concurrently, a distinct note of anti-Semitism began to creep into official statements and press articles in the satellite countries. The

IT TAKES an effort of the imagination to realize that only a few short years ago a major issue of debate in Jewish life was whether it was wiser for the Jews of East Europe to maintain and strengthen their communal and economic institutions or to emigrate to new countries. Today these institutions, painfully rebuilt after the war with American relief funds, no longer exist in the fanatical climate of East Europe; and the issue has become the starker one of whether Jews can physically survive in those countries. PETER MEYER here analyzes the latest threats to Jewish existence in Eastern Europe, particularly Czechoslovakia, where many utterly loyal Communists of Jewish descent have been charged with being "Zionists" in the service of "Western imperialists," and are now awaiting trial on these absurd charges. Mr. Meyer has written widely on developments in Eastern Europe and Russia; his most recent article in COMMENTARY, "The Driving Force Behind Soviet Imperialism," appeared in March 1952.

long-sustained witch hunt against "Zionists" and "cosmopolitans" was now accompanied by rather open hints that Jews were apt to spread subversive infections. And behind the smoke screen of this propaganda, mass deportations of "bourgeois," "parasitic," "unreliable," and "alien" elements, among them a great and disproportionate number of Jews, were conducted in the cities of Hungary, Rumania, and Slovakia.

Equality of citizenship irrespective of race, religion, or ethnic origin is still "guaranteed" by the satellite constitutions. Anti-Semitism and racist propaganda are still banned by the penal codes. Prominent Communists of Jewish origin still hold offices in Hungary and Poland. But the general trend is unmistakable; and if we had any doubts, they would be overcome by the fact that what is now happening in the satellite states only follows the pattern already established in the Soviet Union. The Jews of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania, and Poland are again an "alien," suspect group, condemned to the role of scapegoats for the failures and crimes of a totalitarian regime. Those Budapest deportees who sewed on yellow stars when ordered by the Communist authorities to appear for "relocation" instinctively grasped the similarity between the two totalitarian regimes.

OF COURSE, the new wave of purges and arrests which is sweeping the satellite countries has many and complex causes, and the emergence of anti-Semitism is only one of its aspects. The process of Sovietization, which involves the transformation of the economies of the satellite countries to fit Russian needs and which requires the lowering of living standards to the Soviet level, has met a mute but persistent passive resistance.

The peasants have resisted complete collectivization, and their reluctance to produce and deliver at state-dictated prices has caused high costs of living and a scarcity of food in countries which were once called the breadbaskets of Central Europe. Still more dangerous is the passive resistance of industrial workers, expressed in low output, the poor quality of production, and, in the second half of 1951, in a series of wildcat strikes which were severely suppressed but which alarmed the local Communist authorities and their Soviet supervisors. More and more, the newspapers and the speeches of Communist leaders complained about the underfulfilment of plans, low productivity, the low morale of the labor force, the passivity of local party and union units.

The native Communist bureaucracy, forced to increase exploitation for Russian benefit but faced with an increasing resistance by the population, was again confronted by the basic dilemma of satellite Europe: to give in to popular pressure and try to reduce Soviet demands meant to be accused of "opportunism" and "nationalism"; to increase exploitation in accordance with Russian wishes meant to disorganize the economy and risk punishment for inefficiency. A series of reorganizations of the administrative and economic set-up were attempted but did not solve the problem.

The way out was to find scapegoats who could be made responsible—to the Russians—for inefficiency and—to the native populations—for increased exploitation and the excesses of terror. In order to calm the native population, the scapegoats had to be accused of economic sabotage, corruption, terroristic methods, and offenses against "proletarian democracy"; while to conform to Soviet ritualistic formulas, they had to be charged also with capitulation before the capitalists and kulaks, with nationalism and Titoism. And of course, they also had to be spies and assassins in the service of Western imperialism.

A PURGE of "nationalists," "Titoists," and "Western agents" had been going on in the satellite countries since the defection of

Tito in 1948. Its main victims had been, up to 1951, men with domestic roots and nationalist leanings, who could with some reason be suspected of striving for greater independence from Russia. Wladislaw Gomulka in Poland, Laszlo Rajk in Hungary, Traicho Kostov in Bulgaria were such men, with a certain independence of mind and strong characters. They had been the organizers of domestic resistance under the Nazis and still enjoyed some popularity among the people. They were liquidated because Moscow was afraid that they might attempt to become the imitators of Tito.

But in 1951 the direction of the purge suddenly changed. The men who were now being denounced and liquidated were of a quite different breed: they were the "Muscovites," men who had been known for years as the faithful hatchet men of Moscow. They were not popular leaders but rather obscure *apparatchiki*; their high positions were not due to any domestic popularity but to their career in the Moscow-dominated party machine. It now looked as if Stalin was rewarding with liquidation his most humble and obedient servants.

Nowhere was the trend reversed more dramatically than in Czechoslovakia. In that country, the purge of deviant Communists had started later than in the other satellite states and not without public prompting from the outside. It was certainly strange when, in the public trial of Laszlo Rajk in Budapest in September 1949, some defendants "confessed" that a widespread and powerful Titoist conspiracy existed in Czechoslovakia—while the Prague authorities seemed to know nothing about it. But, of course, they understood the hint and soon afterwards the Czechoslovak purge started in earnest.

At the beginning, its most conspicuous victims were men with Czech or Slovak nationalist leanings. Foreign Minister Vlado Clementis, demoted in March 1950, and arrested several months later, had opposed the Soviet-Nazi pact and collaborated, although on party orders, with President Benes in London. The chairman of the Foreign Af-

fairs Committee of the parliament and editor of the central party organ, Vilem Novy, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade, Evzen Loebel, the officials of the Foreign and Information Ministries, Arthur London, Evzen Klinger, Stanislav Budin—these and others had lived in Western countries during the war and could be charged with being infected by Western ideas. All of them were old friends of President Klement Gottwald, and informed observers considered their purge a preparation for his downfall. Many of them were Jews, but this fact was not stressed in any way at that time. Their Western sympathies were ascribed to their Czech or Slovak "nationalism"—not to the euphemistic "cosmopolitanism."

But at the beginning of 1951, the situation suddenly changed. Clementis had already been in jail for some time, and at a meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist party in February, his case was reported on. But the report was delivered by the local secretary of the party in Slovakia and the case treated as a matter of secondary importance. A new and much more sensational conspiracy had been "uncovered," this time not in government offices, not in the entourage of President Gottwald, but in the central secretariat of the party, among the closest collaborators of Rudolf Slansky. Slansky himself was not charged with any complicity; rather, it was alleged, it was under the cover of his "prolonged illness" that the conspirators had conducted their work. The main villains were Otto Sling, the party secretary in Brno, and his lady friend Marie Svermova, Slansky's deputy in the party headquarters. Sling was accused of being an Anglo-American spy, and the conspirators were charged with putting their people in high party positions throughout the country in order to prepare a coup against Gottwald. It was significant that Slansky, still Secretary General and present at the proceedings, was not allowed to report on the purge. He merely observed while his aides were demoted and jailed.

IT WAS at this stage that the anti-Semitic note appeared. It expressed itself in the

selection of the victims as well as in the choice of the accuser. Otto Sling was a Jew, and his father had been a manufacturer in the German-speaking town of Teplice. His alleged co-conspirators were Vitezslav Fuchs, the district party secretary in Moravska Ostrava, Hanus Lomsky-Lieben, the district secretary in Plzen, Ruzena Dubova, a party secretary in Brno, Ervin Polak, Deputy Minister of the Interior, Bedrich Reycin, the head of army intelligence, all of whom were known to be of Jewish origin. (The fact that Ostrava, Plzen, and Brno were the places where the workers' passive resistance was strongest and where strikes had occurred, left little doubt that the intention was to find suitable scapegoats, for the populace as well as for the Russians.)

Vaclav Kopecky, the Minister of Information, was the accuser. He was the man who had referred, as early as 1947, to the Jewish refugees from Carpatho-Russia as "scum" and "those bearded Solomons." In his presentation, he told the Central Committee that Sling was a "cosmopolitan," that he had no roots in the Czech nation, that he came from the "German family of a Teplice manufacturer," and that he had had a love affair with the wife of the coal magnate Petschek. Petschek in Czechoslovakia is the perfect stereotype of a Jewish capitalist, the Czech equivalent of Rothschild. Sling had become a traitor and spy not because—like Clementis—he was a Czech nationalist but because he was a "cosmopolitan" of "bourgeois origin."

Sling was obviously a stand-in for Slansky. In September 1951, the Secretary General, isolated after the liquidation of his lieutenants in the party apparatus and in the police, was removed from his party office. His regime in the party, it was now charged, had made Sling's conspiracy possible. He had introduced dictatorial methods and tried to establish a second center of power. For two and a half months, Slansky was allowed to head a spurious office in the government with the title of vice-premier. Then it was "discovered" that he had been directly involved in the conspiracy, had been, as a matter of fact, its real head, and, of course, an

imperialist spy. No proofs were offered for the charge, but party members were called upon to provide them by reporting his suspect moves. Slansky was arrested and a new wave of denunciations and persecutions began.

THIS time no doubt was possible that the new purge was a purge of Jews. Whether they were friends of Slansky or enemies, whether they were working in the party apparatus, in government offices, or in the nationalized industries, Jews were demoted, accused of sabotage, espionage, and treason, and arrested. Ludvik Frejka-Freund, the economic adviser of President Gottwald and one of the authors of the Five Year Plan, Rudolf Margolius, Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade, Gustav Bares-Breitenfeld, chief of party propaganda (and one of the three men who had investigated the charges against Sling and Svermova), Bedrich Geminder, the party's foreign expert and its former representative in the Cominform, Dr. Zikmund Stein, for thirty years the trusted party lawyer, were among the most prominent victims. F. C. Weisskopf, the ambassador to Peking, Eduard Goldstuecker, the minister to Tel Aviv, Arnost Tauber, the minister to Bern, Jiri Fischl, head of the Czech mission in Berlin, were recalled from their diplomatic posts and disappeared; some minor diplomatic officials abroad found asylum in democratic countries. Most of the victims were Communists of long standing; none of them was a Zionist or had any interest in Jewish religious or communal life. In most cases, their only relation to Jewishness was what the Nazis used to call "racial origin." Reports about their fall often describe them as "associates" of Slansky, and of course, nobody in the Communist party could escape some association with the powerful Secretary General who had placed and supervised the party cadres. But many victims have never been associated with him in a factional way, and some were indeed his rivals or opponents.

The few real Zionists still remaining in Czechoslovakia were also arrested. The Czech Communist regime, following in the

path of the Hungarian and Rumanian governments,* began to deport "bourgeois elements"—among whom former Jewish businessmen formed the largest part—from Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, soon after Slansky's fall. At the same time, Mordecai Oren, a left-wing and pro-Communist leader of the Israeli Mapam party, disappeared in Prague while passing through on his way home from a Communist-sponsored peace conference in Berlin. Several weeks later, after many inquiries from Israel, Czechoslovak authorities revealed that he had been arrested for unspecified "subversive" activities. It was hinted that one of the charges against Slansky would be that he had helped rich Jews to escape to Israel, and that Oren had helped in illegal emigration. In any case, the Czechoslovak authorities now had a Zionist safely in hand for use in the Slansky trial.

On December 18, 1951, Premier Antonin Zapotocky declared that the Czech government "will tolerate no interference in internal affairs, be it from Washington or London, Rome or Jerusalem." On its face, the reference to Jerusalem was absurd: but Zapotocky was obviously interested in suggesting to his audience that a worldwide Jewish conspiracy was afoot against Czechoslovakia. Slansky had been accused of attempts to restore capitalism, and Zapotocky now reminded his audience of "reactionaries" who had wanted to return nationalized industries to "Jewish and other capitalists." The party press took up the clue eagerly. *Tvorba*, the Communist theoretical magazine, wrote about "cosmopolitan elements" who had come from the ranks of the "Zionists" and had "no roots in the nation." The newspaper *Lidove Noviny* attacked the "Zionist agents of imperialism" whose activities "extended far beyond the borders of Israel." The *Pravda* of Bratislava, the party's central organ in Slovakia, asserted that the "Zionists" had "wormed their way into the Communist parties in order to disrupt and undermine them from within." *L'ud*, another Communist newspaper in Slovakia, reminded its readers

* See "Hungary's Jewry Faces Liquidation," in the October 1951 COMMENTARY.

that Slovak workers had been very angry at Jewish capitalists who had tried, after the war, to "recapture their lost positions" and export "great wealth" to Israel. The workers had been accused of anti-Semitism at that time, *L'ud* wrote, but in reality they had only expressed their sound class instinct. And the men who had raised the spurious issue of anti-Semitism were now finally unmasked as cosmopolitan traitors and liquidated. Thus, *L'ud* in effect approved the position of Slovak anti-Semites, who had instigated pogroms and riots in their opposition to the restitution of Nazi-confiscated Jewish property.

In this way the party press established the identity of "cosmopolitan" with "Zionist" and of "Zionist" with traitor. Being a Jew meant being suspect of these crimes; for the mass of less sophisticated readers, "Zionist" simply meant Jew. Anti-Semitism, slightly disguised as anti-Zionism, became respectable again. Official propaganda spoke of "Jewish capitalists" and their agents. But which Jew was not a capitalist agent if Slansky himself was one?

SEVERAL theories have been offered in explanation of these startling developments. One can be discarded in advance: the official one. Slansky and Ana Pauker certainly did not want to overthrow the Communist regime and restore capitalism. They were faithful and obedient servants of Stalin. They could not aspire to the role of Tito because they lacked all popularity and were the most hated of the Communist leaders of their countries. Their ascendancy was not due to any popular support, but only to their position in their party machines. Surrounded by Moscow creatures and Soviet spies, they could not even dream of a revolt against Moscow.

Another theory maintains that Gottwald rather than Slansky is the Czech Tito, and that he has fought Moscow with Moscow's weapons, accusing Moscow's agents of Titoism and liquidating them before they could liquidate him. This theory, although not absurd *a priori*, seems to be refuted by two

facts. If it were true, Moscow would have intervened—and it has not, even though a year has elapsed since Slansky's fall. And even if Stalin perhaps hesitated to intervene openly in Czechoslovakia, it is inconceivable that he would not have intervened in Rumania, swarming with Soviet troops and under his very nose. If "national Communists" are now liquidating the "anational" agents of Moscow in Rumania and Czechoslovakia, then it must be occurring with the full consent of Moscow.

Only one explanation remains. There is no question that there were different factions among the Communist leaders in the satellite countries, competing among themselves and denouncing each other in Moscow. It is quite possible that these factions speculated on the victory of different groups in the Moscow Politburo, and that Slansky and Ana Pauker bet on the wrong horse. About these things we know too little to be sure. It is also possible—and that seems to be the simplest explanation—that Stalin played with several factions, inciting one against the other and thus keeping the satellite bureaucracy divided and impotent. But then, it would seem, the situation in these countries became so bad that scapegoats were demanded. It can be easily understood why Stalin, faced with passive resistance of the workers and with general unrest, chose to support, for a while, the "native sons." Domestic leaders with some popularity were needed to pacify the population. Mysterious, little-known, and "alien" *apparatchiki* made much better scapegoats. And the Jews among them made the best ones because one could mobilize against them the underground forces of anti-Semitism.

IT HAS long been one of the Communist articles of faith that intergroup tensions will disappear when the class divisions of bourgeois society are abolished. If there is no exploitation, no economic competition, there will be no envy, no hate, no prejudice against alien groups. Anti-Semitism grows out of the "abnormal social composition" of the Jewish minority. When Jewish capitalists

and businessmen disappear, when Jews become workers and farmers, there will be no social reasons for anti-Semitic feelings. The best way to emancipate the Jews is thus to expropriate them. That is the theory which was tested by Russian history after the First World War and by Central European history after the Second.

In Central Europe, the Nazis exterminated most of the Jewish population, expropriated all Jewish property, and left the surviving remnant utterly impoverished. Astonishingly, all this did not weaken but rather strengthened anti-Semitism. After the war, the Jewish survivors hoped for compensation and restitution. They did not ask for the return of big enterprises, in any case subject to nationalization under the laws of the post-war regimes. Small factories and shops, homes, apartments, personal belongings, still remained private property; but when the Jewish survivors claimed them, they were violently opposed in two quarters.

First of all, there were the peasants who held former Jewish land, the artisans and businessmen now in possession of Jewish shops, people living in Jewish apartments, men who had undertaken to care for Jewish property or had been appointed custodians of such property by the Nazis or their successors—all of these had become accustomed to thinking of their new possessions as their own and of the surviving Jews as intruders.

This group was so numerous that the Communists—as well as other parties which were at that time still legal—undertook to defend them. Jewish claims were sabotaged, and restitution laws were either not enforced, weakened by amendment, or repealed. And this struggle over restitution was accompanied by open or covert anti-Semitic agitation which resulted in an increase of anti-Jewish feelings.

But there was another and much more formidable opponent of restitution: the Communist bureaucracy, which already looked on all the wealth of the nation as its own property. In its eyes, the Jews requesting restitution, however modest and well founded their claims, were “looters of national prop-

erty” who were trying to “subvert socialist economy” by “capitalist restoration.” It was this bureaucracy that sabotaged restitution proceedings, terrorized claimants into abandoning their suits, and tolerated a campaign against “Jewish capitalists” with distinct anti-Semitic overtones. Zapotocky had this in mind when he reminded his 1951 audience of the attempts to restore “nationalized industries” to “Jewish capitalists” in 1947.

The full expropriation of the large-scale property owners in the satellite countries was followed by a violent attack on the lower middle classes. Among them were many Jews who had managed, with little or no assistance from the restitution laws, to set themselves up as small businessmen and tradesmen in the permitted “private sector” of the economy. New laws expropriated their businesses. Now forced to live by selling whatever personal possessions they owned and to engage in marginal economic activities, they were denounced as “criminal speculators” and “black marketeers.” Finally, many of them were arrested, sentenced to jail, or deported for forced labor. The expropriation of the Jewish capitalist became in the end the expropriation of the Jew; and all along the press denounced the harried Jewish population in terms that reinforced the ingrown anti-Semitism of Central Europe.

THERE were, of course, plans to “re-educate” and “re-stratify” the Jewish population. Jewish producers’ cooperatives, especially in Poland, secured a small part of the Jews a steady income. Set up with funds from the American Joint Distribution Committee, and producing consumption goods for which there was a large unsatisfied demand, some of the co-ops prospered. But not for long. They were accused of “capitalist tendencies,” forced to accept new, non-Jewish (and unskilled) workers, forcibly merged with other, less prosperous cooperatives and finally liquidated. Jewish workers were ordered into heavy industries; but even in the factories, other workers often regarded them as unwelcome competitors, especially if they advanced to supervisory or white-collar positions.

This unhappy history demonstrated anew that the Soviet type of society only created new and sharper class divisions. Hard-driven workers hated the privileged managers and the Stakhanovite aristocracy; peasants fought against the attempts to expropriate their products by requisitions and their land by collectivization; and the competition between individuals in the same social position became murderous, for to keep one's job, one's apartment, one's ration card, one's freedom, and often one's very life, one had to work harder, and to drive one's subordinates more ruthlessly than the next fellow. Jews were caught in this *bellum omnium contra omnes* and anti-Semitism found a fertile soil in the conflicts of the new society.

Workers often selected Jewish managers or supervisors as special targets of their wrath, peasants often blamed their misery on Jewish commissars and speculators, and the bureaucrats tried to divert the hatred of the population to "cosmopolitan traitors." For a long time these feelings were kept underground, and incidents in which they manifested themselves openly were not reported in the press. For, according to official doctrine, anti-Semitism had been "abolished," and if the facts refuted the doctrine, so much the worse for the facts. But everyone felt that the situation was explosive and that a general Jew-hunt would follow if the government gave the green light. And it is for this reason that in all these countries the passion for emigration runs so high among Jews that they will risk every epithet and reprisal to register with the Israeli consulate, and overwhelm every facility for emigration that exists. But as in all Communist countries,

every individual is considered a natural resource, and the last opportunities for legal emigration are disappearing.

Last year, this strong current of anti-Semitism became manifest in two official actions: the deportations and the purges. The deportation of bourgeois and "unreliable" elements in Hungary and Rumania decimated the Jewish communities of those countries; the arrest of Slansky was the beginning of a drive against all Jews in party and office, and the demotion of Ana Pauker was followed by anti-Semitic demonstrations.

AT THE beginning of the postwar era, the Jews in the satellite countries were promised restitution, equality, and free communal development. Later, they were forced to renounce restitution but were told that they would be able to freely develop their culture, if they took a wholehearted part in "socialist reconstruction." Shortly after, their cultural and communal institutions were liquidated or expropriated by the Communists, and they were now told that complete assimilation was the price for civic equality and protection against anti-Semitism. But even when this price was paid, the attack continued. The Jewish Communists, the Slanskys and Paukers, were completely assimilated to their ethnic and social milieu. But even they were still considered members of a "suspect" minority, and they still could be used as scapegoats for the crimes of a hated regime. Under the pressure of the inner conflicts created by the totalitarian society, the discarded weapon of anti-Semitism has once again to be enlisted in the protection of the state.